

**Opening Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey
Energy and Commerce Full Committee Hearing on
“Medicaid: Empowering Beneficiaries on the Road to
Reform”
September 7, 2005**

Today a white hot spotlight is shining on what could be a very black mark in this Congress – the enforcement of budget cuts against the poor while money continues to be shoveled out the door to the richest fat cats and the biggest corporations in the form of tax cuts, subsidies, royalty relief, and other gems of tax avoidance and greed.

And that was BEFORE the hurricane hit.

Now the question is squarely on the table – is this Republican Congress going to “stay the course” on cuts to the least fortunate Americans, to those who disaster, health emergencies, poverty have brought low?

Fundamentally, this is a moral question, not a budget matter. If the budget mattered to this Congress, the tax cuts would have been cancelled after 9/11. but they weren’t. They should have been cancelled after the Administration decided to start a war, but they weren’t. Now the safety net is down for all to see, and billions more are needed to rebuild the Gulf Coast, and yet here we are, engaging in the process of deciding how many

more poor or near-poor families should be asked to pay more so that changes don't have to be made in tax cuts to the rich.

Just last week the U.S. Census announced that 1.1 million more people fell into poverty in 2004, bringing the total number of impoverished Americans to 37 million. There is a report out today that during this Administration, the infant mortality rate in the United States started rising for the first time since 1958, and has actually risen every year in the last 5 years. An African-American baby in Washington, DC has less chance of surviving to age one than a baby born in some cities in India...

50 percent of the children in Louisiana are living at the poverty level.

When are we going to wake up? Today? Here? In this committee?

I urge my colleagues to respond to the human misery that is building up while government's priorities were elsewhere. We must not cut \$10 billion from Medicaid to finance enormous tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. It is wrong, just plain wrong, and just about everyone knows it except the leadership in this Congress.

Instead of cutting Medicaid for budgetary purposes in ways that harm beneficiaries, we should consider real reforms that reinvest saving in health care and strengthen this critical safety net program.